

# Wass Consulting Group, Inc.

## *Management Insight*

<http://www.wcginc.com>

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### Is Culture the Culprit? What Are the Symptoms and Indicators?

The first in this series of five *Management Insights* addressed the question, “*Is Culture the Culprit? Why Should You Care?*” It underscored the fact that corporate culture is a primary driver of business results. It also showed how the other ingredients of a successful business (i.e., strategy, organization, business processes, resources, products, etc.) are affected by the culture of your organization, and must be viewed as an integrated whole rather than as discrete, self-sustaining pieces. In this article, we help you look for some of the potential symptoms and indicators related to a culture that might not support your organization’s Key Leverage Factors (KLFs). We do so by posing various questions you should ask yourself to determine whether or not your culture supports the business results you desire to achieve. No single answer will definitively determine whether it does or does not, but collectively your answers can begin to provide a barometer of your organization’s cultural environment.

As you consider the culture and other aspects of your company/organizational unit, **look at the people who work with you.** Insert 1 asks about your people.

#### Insert 1: Questions about Your People

- Do they know why they were hired?
  - a. For specific skills and abilities, because “we needed somebody”, or because they knew the right people?
- Do you know why they accepted the job?
- Do they work here because it is a high, first choice from among several alternatives, or for some other reason?

**Look at how things are managed.** Executives, managers, and supervisors have a huge impact on culture, and can change it for the better or worse. Insert 2 asks about your organization’s management processes.

#### Insert 2: Questions about Management Processes

- Do people know what is expected of them?
- How do they know?
- Do they have conflicting expectations from their bosses, from their peers, and/or from their subordinates?
- Do they get regular and consistent performance feedback and appraisals? (The Performance Appraisal process in many companies is a major dysfunctional area.)
- How do your employees get what they need from other people in order to do their jobs well?
- Are people safe in asking for what they need, and are others able to feel safe in discussing the conflicts or limitations of those requests?

In some cultures, power is a dirty word, while “empowerment” is a good thing. Insert 3 asks about empowerment and control in your organization.

#### Insert 3: Questions about Empowerment and Individual Control

- What kinds of, and how much control do people think they have over their job, its priorities and objectives?
- What kinds of control and how much do they *really* have?
- The nature of the workplace will generate conflicts as well as bring benefits. How are such conflicts handled and resolved?

All companies have goals, both formal and informal. Many have Mission Statements posted on various walls and in company manuals. Employees in most organizations have individual objectives and standards they must meet. Sometimes these have to be changed because of market pressures, new products or services, or staffing changes - and people must change their work practices to meet these needs. Insert 4 asks about the setting of goals and objectives in your company/organization.

#### Insert 4: Questions about Goal Setting

- How are goals and objectives set in your company?
- Are they collaborative?
- How involved are people in setting goals for themselves, their departments, and the company? How involved do *they* think they are?
- Is the reasoning behind each goal or objective well understood, shared, and supported?
- Is there a strong team commitment to reaching these goals?

Everyone communicates, all the time; even silence can say a lot! While there are both internal and external communications, culture deals primarily with internal communication patterns. Insert 5 asks about how your company/organization communicates.

#### Insert 5: Questions about Internal Communications

- How does your organization communicate with itself?
- When you want to get the word out, do you post a memo, send an email, call a meeting, or make a phone call?
- How do meetings work in your company?
  - Who calls them?
  - Do they start on time?
  - Do they have a clear purpose and agenda?
  - Are the right people there?
  - Are the participants highly involved?
  - Do they end on time?

In addition to the present, you may also need to consider future changes that could have a profound impact on your organizational culture. In many cases, business failures occur because companies fail to consider the effects of certain changes on culture. Examples of such changes are:

- Changes in the **competitive market environment** (e.g., a customer service driven culture will respond differently than a technology driven one).
- Changes in **production methods** (e.g., the invention of the assembly line changed industry production cultures, just as “Lean” and “Just In Time” manufacturing has changed the current shop floor).
- Changes in the **legal environment** (e.g., regulatory pressures, OSHA).
- **Mergers and acquisitions.** When two companies merge, two different cultures must blend and a new one emerge if the joint company is to be successful. This becomes even more difficult when these two companies have been built from very diverse cultures, including geographic ones.

Underlying, affecting, and often driving most of the answers to the questions raised above are the beliefs that people have about how and why the organization does what it does, and people in it act the way they do. These are the hardest aspects of an organization to detect, but lie at the core of what characterizes and sustains it.

We hope your responses to these questions clarified your view of your current business and cultural environment. By asking a number of simple, straightforward questions, this *Management Insight* addressed how you might begin to identify potential symptoms and indicators of cultural attributes usually associated with organizations whose culture does not support the Key Leverage Factors (KLFs) important to business success. By beginning this process before such problems are obvious to all, management can head off trouble before it affects

results, and avoid playing catch-up to address something which is already sapping performance. How you can tell more definitively whether your current culture will get you the results you desire, and more importantly, which areas may need specific efforts to strengthen them, is the subject of our next two *Management Insights*. This and all of the other issues of *Management Insight* in this series (once issued) can be found on our website at <http://www.wcginc.com>.

If you have comments or questions on this *Management Insight* or on the topics addressed in it, please feel free to contact either Len Wass or John Trenkle by phone or e-mail.

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**The Wass/Trenkle** group of companies is a collaborative initiative of the **Wass Consulting Group** and **Trenkle and Associates**. Our combined resources are unique, and are aimed at helping our clients *“improve business results through cultural change.”*

We are innovators in this field and have developed a unique and proprietary **Performance Scan<sup>SM</sup>** that enables top management to readily identify the current state of its organizational culture and to identify its specific strengths and weaknesses. This enables top management to take targeted actions to improve those cultural and business attributes that will have the greatest impact on business results. This puts management in the driver’s seat by providing them with the information needed to decide upon and begin targeted performance improvements. Skilled and experienced professionals support these efforts, complementing existing organization resources to move toward better results at a very high tempo of improvement. Until the Wass/Trenkle initiative was launched, management had no reliable way to tackle the monumental task of energizing the corporate culture to improve business results. Our approach lets management focus on key aspects of their business and culture, and identifies the actionable improvements that bear directly on their business results.

Our unique blend of skilled and mature consultants provides an array of proven consulting tools, techniques, methodologies, and mixture of proprietary assessment tools and approaches. We provide an extraordinarily accurate method for determining if cultural or business change is required, the extent of such change, and where such changes should be best applied. We combine the well researched and documented survey methodology, organizational diagnosis, and organizational development consulting capabilities of Trenkle and Associates with the more traditional general management consulting experience and knowledge of the Wass Consulting Group. This provides our clients with the skill and experience needed to diagnose and implement cultural transformation that results in improved business performance.